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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 YEREVAN 001706

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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [MARR](#) [EAID](#) [KDEM](#) [AM](#)
SUBJECT: ARMENIAN PARLIAMENT DISCUSSES NATIONAL SECURITY
STRATEGY

Classified By: CDA A. F. Godfrey for reasons 1.4 (b, d).

SUMMARY

11. (U) Members of parliament debated the country's first-ever draft National Security Strategy December 1. Defense Minister Serzh Sargsian presented the draft and moderated a remarkably civil and constructive discussion. Heads of foreign missions, representatives of NGOs and journalists were invited to observe the proceedings. Opposition politicians objected to the fact that the strategy was not subject to a vote by parliament, but only non-binding discussion. Sargsian said that concrete proposals for changes could still be incorporated. The strategy itself describes in very general terms Armenia's goals and perceived threats, covering everything from Diaspora relations to N-K to energy security. One critic called it "a collection of mottoes," but as a consensus document, we see good value in the process, if not the product. END SUMMARY.

12. (U) National Assembly Speaker Tigran Torosian summoned the diplomatic corps December 1 to observe an all-day parliamentary debate on the merits of Armenia's new National Security Strategy, which had been drafted with considerable input and consultation from the U.S. National Defense University (NDU), as well as from Moscow and Brussels. The parliament debate capped several days of television appearances by Defense Minister Sargsian to explain the new draft. This document, when complete, will complete a task agreed to in Armenia's IPAP with NATO.

13. (U) The draft's priorities include pursuing the GOAM's policy of complementarity and developing multilateral relations within NATO, as well as with the U.S. and Russia; "long term" programs to prevent and neutralize "external" threats; strengthening Armenia's defense capacity and modernizing the armed forces; and supporting relations with the Diaspora through dual citizenship and repatriation. On the domestic side, the draft prioritizes territorial integrity and self-governance, preventing migration out of the country; poverty reduction; and support of small and medium-sized businesses, among other things.

PARLIAMENT CONDUCTS A REAL DEBATE

14. (U) The televised discussion was civil and constructive, and well-attended, even by business/oligarch members who rarely appear for parliamentary business. The deliberations featured a genuine give and take, with the Defense Minister

responding substantively to thoughtful questions from MPs.
(NOTE: Although a number of opposition parties, including
Orinats Yerkir, the People's Party and National Unity,
boycotted the event, others remained and participated. END
NOTE.) MPs said they found the document balanced and
comprehensive. Sargsian and parliament Speaker Tigran
Torosian also tolerated detracting voices, such as that of
influential independent deputy Victor Dallakian. Dallakian's
strongest objections to the strategy were in how it was
presented to the parliament. He said that he document should
either have been a legal instrument (which MPs could approve
or disapprove) or the presentation should have been in a
standard hearing, in which the parliament's rule of order
applied. The event was widely covered in the media. Press
commentators noted that some of the oligarch MPs were
motivated by the presence of the powerful Minister of Defense
to stay through the end of the hearings, despite the fact
(the journalists opined) that they had probably not even been
aware of the strategy's existence before the discussion.

BILATERAL RELATIONS

15. (U) Sargsian said that Armenia worked towards the
improvement of relations with Turkey through official
channels and non-official contacts, but said the GOAM did not
accept any preconditions for establishment of relations
advanced by the Turkish government. He repeated the
government line that Turkey should recognize the events of
1915 as "genocide," as a matter of "historical justice." In
response to MPs' assertion that the strategy should call for
international recognition of Nagorno Karabakh, Sargsian
demurred, saying it was more important that Azerbaijan

YEREVAN 00001706 002 OF 002

recognize NK's independence. One of the security strategy
working group members, Nikolay Hovhannesian (director of
Oriental Studies at the national Academy of Sciences), said
it was important to set priorities for Armenia. "In the
initial document we focused on the 'European axis,' but later
on we were bale to include our 'Eastern interests' in the
strategy as well, because it is essential for us,"
Hovhannesian said. He noted that an Iranian presidential
adviser on security matters had discussed the draft with some
working group members during his recent visit to Yerevan.

16. (U) Some MPs suggested making European Union accession an
explicit priority in the strategy. Sargsian countered that
some important issues on the GOAM's agenda did not need to be
specifically cited in the document. (COMMENT: The message
was clear: Armenia should not provoke Russia by stating
clearly its EU intentions. END COMMENT.)

17. (C) COMMENT: This was an unusual and constructive example
of parliamentary -- and by extension, public -- debate about
the issue that arguably matters more than any other to the
Armenian electorate: national security. Armenia's national
security establishment has never before felt moved to explain
its thinking to the general public. It was an interesting
step for Sargsian to take; particularly when considering that
parliament has no formal role in approving the National
Security Strategy, though of course it appropriates defense
funding. In addition to completing one of Armenia's
commitments to NATO, this high-visibility rollout of the
national security strategy marks another step in Sargsian's
gradual "coming out" as a presidential candidate for 2008 --
and a useful way of reminding voters of the gray genera's
biggest political selling point: He's the man who can best
protect Armenians from imminent security threats, foreign and
domestic.
GODFREY